



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Date: Feb 22, 2010

To: Environment Committee

Testimony in Support of:

Raised Bill No. 5117 - AN ACT CONCERNING CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION RESTRICTIONS HELD BY THE STATE

Submitted by: Jiff Martin, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of 200 businesses and non-profits as well as over 700 individuals committed to increasing the state's commitment to farmland preservation.

The Working Lands Alliance coalition is supportive of HB 5117 and its intent to strengthen the Department of Agriculture's ability to monitor and enforce its conservation easement restrictions held on 265 farm properties containing over 35,000 acres of prime and important farmland soils, and representing a tax-payer investment of over \$100 million since 1978.

Thirty years ago our state leaders enacted landmark legislation with passage of Public Act 78-232. With its passage, this legislation laid the groundwork for what is today known as the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. The main objective of the program is to secure a food and fiber producing land resource base for the future of agriculture in Connecticut. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates that Connecticut has 4,916 farms and 163,686 acres of 'cropland'.¹ The state goal is to protect 130,000 acres of farmland, including cropland and supportive lands such as forest and wetlands.

After three decades of program activity, it is unsurprising that some of the farmland protected by the state has been sold to subsequent owners. Subsequent owners are often less familiar with the rules governing state protected farmland. Although there have been few easement violations so far, it will be an ongoing challenge for the state to educate owners of state protected farmland about the stewardship responsibilities and notification obligations that accompany these lands. RB 5117 ensures that owners of protected farmland are notifying the Dept. of Agriculture of any permit application and strengthens the agency's ability to reverse a permit approval if it violates the terms of the conservation easement restriction.

Working Lands Alliance is strongly supportive of RB 5117.

¹ USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture